

# Parenting in the Parsha

פרשת פנחס

## Perfect is the Enemy of... Perfect

פִּינְחָס בֶּן־אֵלְעָזָר בֶּן־אֶהֱרֹן הַלֵּוֹן הֵשִׁיב אֶת־חַמְתִּי מֵעַל בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּקִנְאוֹ אֶת־קִנְאַתִּי בְּתוֹכֶם  
וְלֹא־כִלִּיתִי אֶת־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּקִנְאַתִּי:

"Pinchas, son of Eleazar son of Aaron the *kohen*, has turned back My wrath from the Israelites by displaying among them his passion for Me, so that I did not wipe out the Israelite people in My passion.

מה ראה? אמר רב ראה מעשה ונזכר הלכה אמר לו אחי אבי אבא לא כך לימדתני ברדתך מהר סיני הבועל את כותית קנאין פוגעין  
בו אמר לו קריינא דאיגרתא איהו ליהוי פרוונקא

The Gemara asks: What did Pinehas see that led him to arise and take action? Rav says: He saw the incident taking place before him and he remembered the halakha. He said to Moses: Brother of the father of my father, (as Moses was the brother of his grandfather Aaron), did you not teach me this during your descent from Mount Sinai: One who engages with a gentile woman, zealots strike him? Moses said to him: Let the one who reads the letter be the agent (*parvanka*) to fulfill its contents

- Sanhedrin 82a

The best preparation for tomorrow is doing your best today.

- H. Jackson Brown, Jr

We live in the surreal world of Snapchat and Instagram. Everyone and everything has to be picture perfect in order to be displayed to the world on social media. In the picture-perfect world we inhabit, there isn't much room for unsightly desserts, poorly cooked or laid out foods, messy homes, or a less than perfectly set table. But, our desire for perfection may be setting our kids on the path to imperfection.

When the debacle of Zimri and Kazbi unfolds in the aftermath of Bilam, the masses and the leaders of the *Bnei Yisroel* stand by, paralyzed with uncertainty, indecision, and fear. Only Pinchas steps forward to remind Moshe that he had already taught them the proper response to such an event, whereby the zealot would avenge the shame of G-d and his people. Reminded of the *halacha*, it would have made sense for Moshe, the undisputed leader of the people, to carry out the consequence. Instead, Moshe seems to shrink from the responsibility, delegating Pinchas to carry out the penalty with the aphorism "let the reader of the letter be the agent to carry it out." What might possess Moshe to pass the responsibility here to his young great-nephew? Wouldn't he, Moshe, be more likely to carry it out properly?

Moshe understood the dual nature of his responsibility in the *midbar*. His job was not just to lead the Jewish people, but to cultivate the next generation of Jewish leadership as well. Those two responsibilities are sometimes at odds. The responsibility to lead requires one to carry out his responsibilities personally and completely. The responsibility to cultivate the next generation's leaders means sometimes passing those responsibilities on to the inexperienced, future leaders, who will gain the experience and confidence to assume the mantle of leadership.

In the fabulous biography of Rav Yisroel Zev Gustman, the author, David Page, reports an exchange that took place between Rav Gustman and his mentor and teacher, the great Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski. Rav Gustman, after the early death of his father-in-law, was selected by Rav Chaim Ozer to fill his father-in-law's now vacant seat on the Vilna Bais Din. Rav Gustman accepted Rav Chaim Ozer's appointment, and,

at 21 years of age, became the youngest member of the prestigious Vilna Bais Din. When a particularly complex and sensitive question came before the young Rav Gustman, he felt unqualified to rule on the issue, and he came to Rav Chaim Ozer to request that he rule on it instead. Rav Chaim Ozer responded to Rav Gustman, "the people of Vilna pay you to *pasken* their *shailos*. You have to *pasken*."

It is an amazing exchange with a powerful lesson, reflecting the true brilliance of Rav Chaim Ozer. Rav Chaim Ozer was well aware that he would have been more likely to arrive at the precise, correct *halachic* ruling than would the young Rav Gustman. But, Rav Chaim Ozer also recognized the imperative of training and building the next generation of *poskim* who would take over when he would no longer be with us. Rav Chaim Ozer understood that the risk of handicapping the *posek* of the next generation was a greater danger than the risk of getting the *psak* wrong in this case.

That was Moshe and Pinchas as well. Moshe stepped aside and asked Pinchas to take responsibility, because Moshe, as well, recognized that the reward of training the next generation outweighed the risk of having him get it wrong.

The lesson for parents? How many times do we fail to delegate tasks to our children for fear of them not getting those tasks perfectly right? Do we micro-manage our children to make sure they get it perfect? The really good parents enjoy ugly looking desserts, imperfect foods, and poorly set tables all done by their children alone. Through trial, error, and gentle, constructive critique the children grow and learn. Those are the children who become the confident, capable adults we want all our children to be.

**Good Shabbos,**

*Rabbi Yisroel Gottlieb*